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ABSTRACT

A report from the United States General Accounting Office regarding the Army's skill training program for enlisted personnel is presented. The Army develops its training program twice a year, determining training requirements for the following year through personnel inventory, analysis model, and manpower program data. These methods were found not to accurately reflect Army requirements for each skill specialty, and recruiter contracting practices often committed the Army, in advance, to train enlisted personnel in specific skills which were overstaffed and had no valid training requirements. Present training program practices could cause the Army to train over 5,900 personnel in excess of requirements in some specialties, at a cost of $20 million, while not training enough people in other skill areas. It is recommended that the Army improve its methodology for determining skill-training rates, minimize overcommitments in more easily filled skills by constraining recruiters, and promptly renegotiate contracts in skills with fiscal year 1976 recruiting overcommitments. (LH)

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UNITED STATES
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE

Improvements Needed In Determining Skill-Training Requirements

Department of the Army

Inaccuracies in setting skill-training rates for enlistees may cause the Army to have too many personnel in some specialties and too few in others.

This report

--identifies the causes of inaccurate training rates,

--gives examples of resulting overcommitments by recruiters, and

--recommends corrective measures.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

ELDERAL PERSONNEL AND
OMPENSATION DIVISION

B-1600096

The Honorable
The Secretary of the Army

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We have surveyed the validity of the Army's fiscal year 1976 initial skill-training rates for enlisted personnel in various occupational specialties. We found that many rates were arbitrarily determined or based on recruiting commitments, not actual Army needs. This practice could cause the Army to train over 5,900 personnel in excess of requirements in some specialties--at a cost of $20 million--while not training enough people in other skills. We believe the Army could take steps to moderate this condition by encouraging some recruits to change their skill-training specialties.

In today's era of tight budgets we recognize the Army is trying to make the most efficient use of resources. Careful management of the enlisted force to insure that the inventories of skilled personnel coincide with job requirements would help accomplish this goal.

The inaccuracies and wide fluctuations in the Army's training program have implications beyond those discussed in this letter. They contribute to problems such as overloads at training centers and schools and broken recruiting commitments. Our report entitled "Military Training Time and Cost Should be Reduced Through Improved Management" (FPCD-76-4, September 2, 1975) identified almost 2 million man-days per year at a cost of $48 million wasted in training status. Delays in starting new members into skill-training accounted for half of that time. In our report on non-high-school graduates and category IV personnel (FPCD-76-24,

January 12, 1976), we discussed training promises perceived but not honored and underuse of skills and training.

The Army should take action to

--improve its methodology for determining skill-training rates,

--minimize overcommitments in more easily filled skills by constraining recruiters, and

--promptly renegotiate contracts in skills with fiscal year 1976 recruiting overcommitments.

During our recent discussions with officials of the Training and Doctrine Command we learned that active Army units conduct additional skill-training in what are known as "shadow schools". This training is not considered when the training program is developed. The Army should identify the amount of such training and the reasons for it, and adjust the training program accordingly.

As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on action taken on our recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report. Copies of this report are being sent to the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Office of Management and Budget; and the Chairmen, House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, Armed Services, and Government Operations.

Sincerely yours,

H. L. Krieger
Director

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED IN DETERMINING SKILL-TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Specialized skill-training prepares enlisted personnel and officers to perform specific jobs. The estimated cost of this training for fiscal year 1976 is $1.9 billion mostly for initial skill-training of approximately 180,000 enlisted personnel.

Our study, completed in December 1975, was conducted at Department of the Army Headquarters and the Military Personnel Center. We examined records, reports, and workpapers relating to initial skill training programs for enlisted personnel. We talked with officials at the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel and at the Military Personnel Center and considered their comments.

DEVELOPING THE TRAINING PROGRAM

The Army develops its enlisted training program twice a year, usually in the spring and fall, at conferences attended by representatives of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel, the Military Personnel Center, the Training and Doctrine Command and others. The stated goal of this process is to provide for training sufficient personnel to bring the total personnel in each speciality to the projected authorization at the end of each fiscal year. The principal inputs to the training program are from the personnel inventory and analysis model and the Army manpower program, which are discussed below. The training requirements for fiscal year 1976 were reviewed at three separate conferences. They were initiated at the October 1974 conference and then modified at the June and October 1975 conferences.

The personnel inventory and analysis model is a computer simulation used by the Personnel Center to determine training requirements for each speciality and skill level so that future inventories will equal authorization.

We found several weaknesses in the requirements produced by the model. They do not in many instances accurately reflect Army requirements because:

--The model is unconstrained, that is, it determines requirements for each skill level in each speciality without considering that total requirements may exceed both planned accessions for the fiscal year and total Army authorizations.

--Requirements for future years are based on the assumption that current training requirements are being met. Often this is not the case, due to training and recruiting shortages.

--Inconsistent retention rates for enlisted personnel were used in the model from one projection period to the next. For example, in the projections for October 1974 and June 1975 specific retention rates were used for each skill level in each speciality. In the October 1975 projection, however, Army-wide retention rates were applied because updated retention rates were not available. In many cases the Army-wide rates differed 25 to 30 percent from the previously used rates.

--The model does not account for those enlisted personnel who are to be retrained from skills with overages to those with shortages.

Center officials said they were revising the model to improve its accuracy but could not estimate when the changes would be implemented.

The Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel computes the Army manpower program. This program projects total Army personnel needs based on anticipated authorizations, budget constraints, losses, and acquisitions. The manpower program produces a total skill-training objective for recruit-training graduates for the fiscal year but does not determine training requirements for each skill.

A comparison of the fiscal year 1976 initial skill-training needs generated for the three conferences by the personnel model and the manpower program is shown in the following chart.

Conference	Personnel model training requirement	Manpower program objective
October 1974	154,800	180,000
June 1975	216,800	186,500
October 1975	222,000	177,700

Before the October 1975 conference, Center officials were asked to suggest reductions to the requirements generated by the model and the training program approved at the June 1975 conference, so that the total number of students trained in fiscal year 1976 would equal the training objectives of the manpower program. Center officials stated they were furnished neither guidance nor procedures for this task. The methodology used to recommend reductions in the training rates did not consider all applicable factors such as course attrition and personnel transfers from one skill to another. In most instances, reductions were not computed to make future inventories equal authorizations in those skills.

Center officials determined the projected overages and shortages in each specialty and recommended reductions for numerous skills in the fiscal year 1976 training program. However, as the following examples indicate, reductions recommended by Center officials would not have entirely eliminated overages. Further, the Army did not always adopt the recommendations because it had recruiting commitments to train greater numbers in those specialties.

--An excess of 3,315 clerk-typists was projected, based on the June program of 7,022. The personnel model computed a need to train 7,932. The Center recommended a program of 4,452, which would have reduced the projected overage to 1,076. The Army, however, had made commitments to train 6,057 persons, so that became the new training program figure.

--An excess of 3,645 unit and organization supply specialists was projected, based on training of 5,077 students. The Center recommended adopting the updated model training requirement of 2,432, which would have reduced the projected overage to 1,318. But the Army had made commitments to train 3,472, which became the new training program figure.

Using the same data, we computed training objectives which would equalize inventories and authorizations at the end of fiscal year 1976 for the above skills. Our computations showed that only 4,194 clerk-typists and 1,086 supply specialists should enter training.

IMPLEMENTING THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Notwithstanding the uncertainties in the skill-training programs, the Army recruits students to fill them. Army officials stated that recruiters contract with enlistees for a particular training course as much as 11 months beforehand. This advanced placement is authorized against the current training requirements under the Army's delayed-entry program.

Based on the training rates established at the June 1975 conference, the Army began recruiting to fill its anticipated fiscal year 1976 school openings. Before the October 1975 conference, changes in authorizations, reenlistment rates, and personnel policies, etc., greatly reduced the need to train personnel for many of these skills and increased the need to train personnel for other skills.

Although we question the validity of the fiscal year 1976 training objectives approved at the October 1975 conference, they are presumably the best estimates the Army had. Based on these objectives, however, the Army would have been training approximately 5,900 personnel more than they wanted to train in 65 separate specialities. These commitments were made against the June training program. The cost of training these personnel would have been over $20 million.

The situations depicted in the following table are typical of these overcommitments.

Specialty	Percent staffed	June training program	Recommended program (October conference)	Recruiting commitments
Pershing missile crewman	147	462	269	460
Unit and organization supply specialist	116	5,077	2,432	3,472
Clerk-typist	98	7,022	4,452	6,057
Office machine repairman	232	43	0	43
Small arms repairman	180	136	0	138
Aircraft powertrain repairman	124	86	50	86
Drummer	146	40	0	28

At the October 1975 conference, the 65 skills for which the Army was overcommitted for fiscal year 1976 were closed to further recruiting. Because some personnel in the delayed-entry program may not actually enter training, the Army probably will not train their total overcommitment. For example, as of early December, Center officials estimated that only about 3,250 personnel would enter supply specialist training in fiscal year 1976, instead of the 3,472 they had recruited.

A similar situation occurred in fiscal year 1975. At the time of the October 1974 conference the Army had committed itself to train approximately 9,000 personnel above fiscal year 1975 training needs in 100 specialities.

Department of the Army officials explained that once they realize that recruiters have contracted with more enlistees than needed in a particular skill, they can pursue a three-step procedure. First the recruiters would try to renegotiate the enlistment contracts and funnel

the enlistees into related skills for which valid requirements exist. If this is impossible, the Army seeks to delay enlistees' training to subsequent fiscal years for which valid requirements exist. As a last resort the Army can break the contracts. Standard enlistment contracts permit the Army to cancel in these circumstances without penalty. Notwithstanding these available procedures, Army officials could not cite any enlistment contract renegotiations or cancellations they had initiated during the year preceding our survey.

In auditing the Lance missile system's management, the Army Audit Agency identified excess training and staffing of repairmen. The audit agency noted that even though the specialty was 146 percent staffed, the Army was planning to train 100 percent of its total authorizations in fiscal year 1976, bringing staffing to over 200 percent. In mid-October the agency recommended that the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel reduce the fiscal year 1976 training program for the specialty and insure that future training programs do not exceed needs. The Deputy Chief agreed with the agency's findings but said that the Army had committed itself to train 57 personnel in the specialty during fiscal year 1976. Army officials said that they planned to (1) use those repairmen already in training to fill requirements anticipated in future years and (2) persuade those not yet in training to voluntarily switch to some other specialty. However, as of late November this information had not been forwarded to recruiters.

Army officials responsible for directing recruiters to begin renegotiating contracts had not been notified of the overages identified in either October 1974 or October 1975. Although these training excesses were noted at both conferences, Army officials had neglected to forward this information to the recruiters. We were told that two explanations were possible: (1) requirements or inventories may have changed or (2) the personnel were being trained in the current year to fill future requirements.

The training program is approved by the Army and is used for budget justification. Therefore, it seems inconsistent that Army officials would ignore the instances of overtraining in the approved program. If, on the other hand, they had more current information on Army training requirements than that in the training program, this information should be used to revise the program.

Training excess personnel to fill anticipated training requirements in future years is an inefficient and uneconomical policy. First, it is not good management practice to hire employees before they are needed. Second, since personnel enlist for a finite period, training them for positions not yet open reduces the time in which the trainees can use their skills. Finally, overtraining in one skill will result in shortages in other skills.

We will soon issue four reports on our comprehensive study of recruiting activities. These reports discuss the quality and quantity of enlistees; the mental testing procedures of the services; advertising for military recruiting; and effectiveness and efficiency of recruiting.

INTERNAL REVIEWS

An April 1975 Department of the Army report on enlisted personnel management systems described problems with master files. Incorrect data in these files causes other errors in personnel actions such as computing training requirements. The report recommended that the Military Personnel Center's enlisted personnel division (1) review projected authorizations and inventory changes in detail each month between training requirement computations and (2) recommend immediate training adjustments to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.

This recommendation had not been implemented at the time of our survey. Center officials meet weekly to determine whether or not they are meeting the approved training program. This procedure does not compare the projected inventories with authorizations to ascertain the validity of the training program. The need for the recommended actions continues.

CONCLUSIONS

Army training requirements are highly sensitive to changes in personnel and recruiting policies and authorizations. Because of shortcomings in its computer model, the Army cannot accurately project training requirements for each specialty. The Army is often committing itself to train enlisted personnel in specific skills as much as 11 months before the training is to begin. This practice has caused the Army to train personnel in skills which are overstaffed and have no valid training requirements.

The personnel inventory and analysis model needs to be revised to agree more nearly with the manpower program. The methodology being used to reconcile the two does not consider all factors and is not designed to equalize authorizations and inventories. Changing the model would eliminate many inaccuracies in setting the training program. Until the model is revised, the Army should adjust requirements manually to derive an acceptable training program. We recognize that because of almost daily authorization changes, training requirements cannot be predicted with certainty, but unnecessary training can be minimized by constraining recruiters. For more easily filled skills, the Army should either begin recruiting later or limit commitments until the annual training requirement is determined finally.

Even though the Army has identified numerous instances of training planned in skills for which no valid requirement exists, it has not renegotiated or terminated the enlistment contracts. Reaction to overcommitments must be prompt, or personnel will be trained unnecessarily. Furthermore, training against future-year requirements is not, in our opinion, cost-effective.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the Secretary of Army:

--Promptly revise the personnel inventory and analysis model to agree with the manpower program.

--Provide formal guidance for deriving recommended training programs, emphasizing the need to balance inventories and authorizations in each skill.

--Refrain from training personnel to fill anticipated future-year requirements, unless such training can be shown to be cost effective.

--Minimize overcommitments in more easily filled skills by either (1) reducing the lead time in the delayed-entry program or (2) recruiting only a portion of the anticipated requirements until the annual training program can be determined finally.

--Insure that renegotiation of contracts is begun promptly when overcommitments are identified.

--Promptly renegotiate overcommitments identified in the fiscal year 1976 training program.

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